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ABSTRACT

About 50 percent of Sweden's adult population pursues studies in one form or another. A specifically Scandinavian form of adult education is the folk high school. The largest number of adult learners attend the study circles organized by the local branches of Sweden's educational associations. Formal adult education is offered by the local education committees in all of Sweden's 284 municipalities and, in certain educational fields, by the 23 county councils. In addition, two national schools for adults provide supplementary educational opportunities. Municipal authorities are required to organize a special form of adult education known as basic education for adults who are illiterate. Swedish language instruction for adult immigrants is offered free of charge. Public libraries and audiovisual centers play an important role in adult education. Labor market training is any program for which allowances are granted for vocational training by the National Labor Market Board. Personnel and in-house education is financed by employers. Sweden's two largest employee organizations also sponsor training programs. Radio, television, and correspondence schools are also available. The government inspects and finances adult education to a large extent. The rapid growth in adult education has been aided by collaboration among the agencies and organizations involved. (YLB)

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Adult Education in Sweden

Fact Sheets on Sweden

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About 50% of Sweden's adult population pursues studies in one form or another. This is a very high proportion by world standards, and may be partly explained by the great variety of forms of adult study that have gradually emerged in the past hundred years and been justified on different grounds. Those forms which have their roots in the popular movements and are still firmly established there—folk high schools and study circles— are the oldest examples. Correspondence schools and courses arranged by the broadcasting media and the labor market organizations are other important forms. As a modern labor market policy took shape it provided for public labor market training, which is especially intended for the unemployed and people in danger of losing their jobs. In 1968, the state-run system of adult education was augmented by a municipally sponsored system, which gives adults greater opportunities to study at levels corresponding to the senior level of the comprehensive school, i.e. the last three grades of basic compulsory education, and to the upper secondary school, which is voluntary. In addition, there are the educational activities provided by companies and administrative authorities for their personnel.

The forms of education and training mentioned above are usually referred to collectively as "adult education." As such it is a category made to include all education which normally does not tie in with previous formal schooling, and which commences for the vast majority of participants after a shorter or longer period of gainful employment or work in the home. This text will be mainly confined to the following types of adult education: folk high school, study circles, municipal and state-run formal adult education and labor market training. In spite of the fact that many adults take advantage of increased access to higher education, this type of education does not yet fit into the Swedish concept of adult education and is not covered by the following exposition.

All the above categories of adult education generally receive subsidies from the national government.

Let us summarize the aims of adult education. To begin with, adult education should enable middle-aged and older people to raise their level of general knowledge and increase their opportunities for taking part in cultural, social and political activities. It should contribute to the further democratization of society. Adult education should strengthen the position of individuals in working life. It should, however, also cater for individual preferences and needs.

Since the late sixties, adult education has come to cover larger and larger areas. Its forms of distribution have changed and the economic conditions for studies have improved. However, with the fiscal situation so precarious in recent years, some restraints have been imposed.

As of 1976, employers began paying a special payroll tax for adult education. This money is used, among other things, to finance a restricted number of study allowances for adults undergoing education, following the same general principles as for other adult students but also taking into account their obligation to support a family. The payroll tax also finances study circles in civics and in the native languages of immigrants, as well as part of the study circles and outreach programs at workplaces. These funds are distributed by special regional adult education boards.

Outreach programs are aimed primarily at establishing contact with people with less than nine years of elementary schooling. The outreach programs at workplaces are administered by local trade union branches.

All employees enjoy an unconditional right to take leave of absence for studies that must be pursued during working hours. Although the leave to which they are entitled by law is unpaid, certain grants are available. Hourly and daily study grants provide compensation for loss of income. Studies which must be pursued for longer, uninterrupted periods qualify for a special adult study allowance.

For natural reasons the major trade union confederations have shown keen interest both in the form and content of adult education. Recent developments have largely been impelled by union demands.

Residential adult colleges, "folk high schools"

A specifically Scandinavian form of adult education is the folk high school, which is mainly residential. The folk high school is not the form of adult education with the greatest number of participants, but it is the oldest one. The first folk high schools were founded in the mid-19th century to give young rural adults better opportunities for general education. Now they receive students from all strata of life. Today, the folk high schools are owned either by county councils or by trade unions, churches, temperance societies or other non-profit organizations.

Each school determines its own curriculum within the framework of the Folk High School Code. In spite of the fact that there is no official syllabus or compulsory subject matter for folk high schools, some courses can qualify students for university studies. Studies focus on topic areas rather than on single subjects. A significant feature of these schools is the high degree of student participation in educational planning and implementation.

In recent years the around 130 folk high schools have together enrolled about 250,000 students annually. The schools offer a variety of courses ranging from two days to over 30 weeks in length. The past few years have witnessed a changing pattern of recruitment to folk high schools. Great numbers of students are recruited for short courses which the voluntary educational associations, the popular movements and the trade unions organize in partnership with these schools. Enrollments have also increased among the ranks of immigrants and the disabled. An extensive pilot scheme for the instruction of disabled persons is financed with special government funds. Some schools have special programs for young adults who are unemployed and who generally lack interest in studies and vocational training. Many students take long courses to train themselves for full-time leadership of leisure activities. Other schools offer long-term courses in music, art, international development studies, environmental problems, etc. Sign-language interpreters are trained at an establishment with an exclusively sign-language environment.

Training of teachers for the folk high schools is organized at the University of Linköping. The training period is one year. Before entering, the students have a university degree and some experience of adult education or a thorough knowledge in the field of adult education acquired over many years of practical work. The training combines theory with practice.

Voluntary educational associations

By far the largest number of today's adult learners attend the study circles organized by the local branches of Sweden's educational associations. In the fiscal year 1987/88, nearly 312,000 study circles attracted about 2,640,000 participants, of whom slightly over half were women. This figure should be put in relation to Sweden's total population of 8.5 million and its adult population (aged 20–67) of about five million. These study circles are sponsored by eleven voluntary educational associations, of which the largest, the Workers' Educational Association (ABF), accounts

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for one third of the total study circle hours qualifying for national government subsidies.

In the regulations for awarding government subsidies to voluntary educational associations, a study circle is defined as "an informal group which meets for the common pursuit of well-planned studies of a subject or problem area which has previously been decided upon." The group itself determines how its work is to be planned and carried out. A circle leader has certain coordinating and administrative tasks but does not act as a teacher in the ordinary sense. There are no formal requirements for circle leaders.

To be eligible for a subsidy, a study circle must have between five and twenty members. It must meet for at least five sessions spread over at least four weeks. The subsidy, fixed at a certain amount per period, covers about 40% of the costs, with the remainder coming from fees and municipal grants. Study circle sessions are supplemented by cultural activities such as amateur projects and cultural programs for associations and societies.

Two subject areas account for two thirds of the study circle hours: esthetic (arts) subjects and civics. Study circles in civics, Swedish and mathematics, and study circles for disabled persons and in the native languages of immigrants have been given higher priority through a system of extra government subsidies.

Municipal adult education

Formal adult education—both general and vocational—is offered by the local education committees in all of Sweden's 284 municipalities and also, in certain educational fields (e.g. the care sector), by the 23 county councils. In addition there are two national schools for adults which provide supplementary educational opportunities (see below).

The municipal adult education *(komvux)* curriculum which came into force in 1982 confirmed the divorce between this type of adult education and youth education. This curriculum is specially designed for adults, based on adult needs and tailored to the situation of the adult. Although the curriculum outlines a separate system of education, all courses and leaving certificates are comparable with those of youth education, and educational standards are intended to be the same in both systems.

Municipal adult education also includes special vocational courses. These courses are designed to meet educational needs not normally existing in the youth education sector, e.g. shorter courses in less common occupational fields.

Courses and leaving certificates are based on the modular system, which can be regarded as a modified unit/credit system. This makes it possible for the adult participant to begin studying in accordance with his own needs, i.e. to supplement previous basic education and/or job experience.

There are few formal obstacles built into the system. The adult student enters the modular system at the level which is suitable for him and studies as far as he needs to, either part-time or full-time.

The individual determines his own workload, in keeping with his circumstances and is free to compose his own study program according to personal preference and needs. He can study during the daytime or evening, combine general subject courses with vocational courses, attend just a single subject course in the evenings or else include a maximum of educational activity in the working week. He may combine studies with full-time gainful employment or study full-time on a government grant for a limited period.

There are no major formal impediments such as entrance requirements or examinations. Individual opportunities are limited only by practical and economic constraints.

Formal adult education is organized into separate adult education units in more than 150 municipalities. Elsewhere it is led by the principal of a youth education school. Many teachers divide their time between adult education and youth education.

Just as in youth education, instruction is free of charge and legislation passed in the mid-1970s entitles adults to special forms of study assistance and also to educational leave. This has led to an increase in the full-time daytime student population, but the traditional part-time adult student attending evening classes still predominates.

In addition to qualifying for higher studies, many students use this kind of adult education as a means of improving their professional qualifications, for instance by attending computer science courses. Others may obtain their basic qualifications for a certain job, for example in the restaurant trade or the care sector.

Municipal adult education opportunities range from short-cycle vocational courses to post-secondary academic courses or advanced full-time vocational education.

According to the latest figures, the number of participants in municipal adult education (for a selected week) was roughly 160,000, of whom some 100,000 were women. On average, students take two courses at once. More than 30% of the students are taking general subjects at upper secondary school level, while 25% are undergoing vocational education and the remainder are taking courses at a lower level.

Efforts have been made recently to bring formal municipal adult education more closely into line with the immediate requirements of the labor market and in fact to utilize this kind of adult education as an instrument of labor market policy. Special courses and student benefits have been introduced for the unemployed.

Municipal adult education can also sell educational courses to companies and authorities on a contract basis. This gives adults an opportunity of improving their formal qualifications within the framework of personnel training activities. The volume of this contracted education activity equals roughly 20% of the total formal adult education output offered by the municipalities but is expected to increase.

Basic education for adults

Legislation was introduced in 1977 requiring municipal authorities to organize a special form of adult education known as basic education for adults *(grundvux)*. Basic education for adults is mostly organized within or in conjunction with formal municipal adult education, but it is a special type of education with a different status, since the municipalities are required by law to make it available.

Basic education for adults was originally intended for Swedes who were "functionally illiterate" and whose knowledge of school subjects was appreciably inferior to that of the average compulsory school pupil. Later on it came to be provided for illiterate or poorly educated immigrants. Instruction can be organized individually or in small groups both in Swedish and in immigrant languages. Studies are mainly pursued on a part-time basis, i.e. up to 15 hours weekly. Participants receive hourly study assistance. Almost 40% of the 22,000 or so people taking part in basic education for adults in 1988 were Swedes.

Courses based on the curriculum of the nine-year compulsory school are offered to inmates of Swedish prisons with little formal education or with a low level of general knowledge. Inmates who especially request it can pursue studies at upper secondary or university levels. As a rule these courses are arranged in collaboration with local school authorities. At certain prisons individual inmates may also study on a full-time basis.

National schools for adults

Educational opportunities of roughly the same kind as formal municipal adult education and based on the same curriculum are offered by two national schools for adults. These provide a supplement to municipal adult education for persons who for various reasons (shift work, geographical distance, etc.) are unable to attend regular courses. The courses at these schools combine various educational methods, including distance studies and intensive short-cycle courses.

Swedish for immigrants

Swedish language instruction for adult immigrants was reformed in 1986 and now takes the form of basic Swedish-language instruction and continuation courses. Tuition is free of charge and, on average, comprises 700 hours. The municipalities are responsible for providing basic Swedish-language instruction for immigrants.

Public libraries and audio-visual centers

Public libraries and audio-visual aids centers run by local education committees play an important part in adult education. Libraries lend books, tapes and filmstrips to study circles, schools and private persons. The centers record radio broadcasts and provide copying and lending services. The libraries arrange exhibitions, lectures, concerts, etc. which tie in with study circles and courses.

Labor market training

Labor market training may be defined as any program for which a special kind of training allowance is granted by the National Labor Market Board *(Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen, AMS)*. These allowances are granted for various kinds of vocational training and for such preparatory training as is required for the vocational program. The following conditions are laid down for receiving such allowances: the applicant is unemployed or runs the risk of becoming so; he is difficult to place in employment; he has reached the age of 20 (in some cases 18); he is seeking work through the public employment service and training can be expected to result in permanent employ-

SEK 1 (Swedish krona) = USD 0.16 or GBP 0.10 (approx.)

ment which would not have been possible without such training. For example, labor market training is required, within certain limits, to help persons who have had little or no training, or whose previous training is out of date, to strengthen their position in the labor market (even if they are not unemployed). It is also intended to help employers in obtaining staff with the requisite skills.

Labor market training may be divided into four main categories depending on who administers the courses: 1) special courses arranged by a labor market training authority—the AMU Group, consisting of a central AMU Board and 25 autonomous regional bodies (commissioned authorities), which succeeded the National Board of Education, with effect from 1986, as the authority responsible for the special labor market training centers (AMU centers); 2) in-house training for established employees, including what is known as bottleneck training; 3) training within the ordinary educational system and 4) courses arranged by organizations. The special courses account for the major part of all labor market training and are mainly held at some 100 special AMU centers throughout Sweden. The number of labor market trainees has been rising since the 1960s, above all concurrently with a growth of unemployment during the 1970s and early 1980s. The total annual enrollment in labor market training has been around 100,000 in the last few years.

The primary objective of labor market training is to ensure steady jobs for the unemployed. Regular follow-up studies show that of those who have completed vocational labor market training, about 70% have obtained employment in the open sector within six months; approx. 80% of these people have, in turn, obtained work within the occupational branch for which they were trained.

Courses used for labor market training must fulfill special requirements. As a rule the training should lead to specific occupations rather than to occupational branches, and the importance of limiting the period of training is often greater than in other forms of training. The construction of courses on a modular system which can be freely combined is particularly suitable for labor market training, as is the division of courses into several stages, each with a varying degree of specialization. To permit the unemployed to start training without any unnecessary delay, courses are arranged as far as possible with continuous admission, rather than being split into terms. It must be feasible to adapt the course range in prompt response to occupational trends on the labor market. A reserve of facilities and equipment should therefore normally be available.

About 15% of those enrolled in labor market training have no other educational attainments than six to eight years of elementary schooling. To give these groups a wider range of choice on the labor market is a major redistributive goal of manpower training. Before commencing their vocational training, these persons can be given preparatory courses of various kinds. Persons with short-term or outmoded training behind them can be given labor market training in the form of special AMU center courses, even if they are not unemployed. Up to 10% of training capacity can be applied to training of this kind.

Personnel education

The in-house education provided by companies and administrative authorities has expanded faster than any other form of adult education during the 1980s. As the decade moved towards its close, the number of Swedes receiving at least one day's staff training every year was put at nearly 2 million. About 40% of these people received one or two days' training, more than 30% received 3–5 days and not quite 30% were given a week or more.

One important reason behind this development is that activities in more and more fields are becoming increasingly dependent on skills and knowledge. Competence requirements are being successively raised as a result of technical progress. Good basic skills are now required of personnel in practically all employment capacities.

Personnel education is very unevenly distributed within the labor force. Both the proportion of employees receiving such education and the scope of the education itself are commensurate with employees' educational and salary levels. Public sector employees, relatively speaking, are offered more education than private employees and men are offered more education than women. In the enterprise sector, the biggest investments in personnel education are made by relatively large and profitable concerns in expanding industries. Then again, personnel education is more widespread in service-producing enterprises than in manufacturing industry. This in turn engenders great regional differences in educational spending.

Personnel education, by definition, is financed by employers. To a great extent it takes place during working hours, but there are also cases of education being financed or otherwise supported by employers outside working hours. Personnel education is organized partly by companies and administrative authorities themselves, through education departments or suchlike, but it has also generated a market for education in which municipalities, through their schools, labor market training, universities and university colleges as well as private educational consultants are active. The total cost of personnel education, loss of output included, was estimated at somewhere between SEK 18 and 25 billion in 1987.

Training programs sponsored by employee organizations

Sweden's two largest employee organizations, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Central Organization of Salaried Employees (TCO), have extensive study programs of their own. They are designed to give union members a solid background in union affairs and other social matters. They also supply trained union officials at local, regional and national levels. Most courses are residential and last one or two weeks, but some last up to six months. The national government provides subsidies for these programs.

Radio, television and correspondence schools

Educational programs on radio and television are produced by a special corporation which operates on government funds. The programs are aimed at the regular schools as well as at adult students and undergraduates in higher education. Broadcast programs are usually supplemented with printed study material. The broadcasting media collaborate with various sponsors of adult education.

Two correspondence schools, *Hermods* and *Brevskolan*, dominate this educational medium. Hermods designs courses chiefly aimed at helping people fulfill the formal requirements for completion of courses at compulsory comprehensive, upper secondary and university levels. Brevskolan mainly caters for the needs of various special-interest organizations.

In recent years the traditional type of correspondence course has been increasingly combined with other forms of instruction, especially study circles and educational broadcasts. This type of combined course generally leads to more effective learning than pure correspondence courses.

Adult education target groups

The heavy expansion of adult education during the first half of the 1970s derived its ideological sustenance from the introduction of nine years' compulsory schooling for all children. One of its cardinal aims was the egalitarian one of bridging the "educational gap" which the reform of compulsory schooling interposed between different generations.

Today, at the beginning of the 1990s, inequalities of education and knowledge have come to be a good deal more complicated. In the first place, practically all youngsters receive 11 years' continuous schooling and it has now been proposed that upper secondary schooling should be extended to three years for all participants. Secondly, a growing proportion of the adult population are taking part in adult education, not least in the form of staff training. Thirdly, demographic changes are rapidly reducing the percentage of adults in the workforce whose education has been of very brief duration. Fourthly, there is the growing realization that learning to a very great extent takes place informally, during working and leisure hours, to one side of formal, quantifiable instruction. Finally, all sectors of working life are making new demands on knowledge and on capacity for personal development.

It is thus more accurate to speak in terms of knowledge gaps between individuals and groups of individuals than of an intergenerational education gap. These knowledge gaps, of course, are partly a matter of differences in the length of formal schooling. Another, equally important cause, however, is the differing extent to which individuals have assimilated their formal education. Youngsters who have not benefitted fully from their nine years' compulsory schooling are particularly vulnerable. Personnel education is very unevenly distributed between members of the community. Over time this bias helps to widen knowledge gaps. Differences in the content and organization of work and differences in leisure-time social conditions mean that different people have very different opportunities for informal learning.

General adult education has the task of helping to reduce these knowledge gaps. This, of course, means special emphasis on measures for those with least formal education behind them, but it also means responsibilities towards those who have com-

pleted a longer study program but, for some reason or other, need to expand or deepen their education so as to retain their footing in the employment sector. This is where public adult education must try to counteract the injustices which personnel education entails. But adult education still has important target groups in those who leave compulsory school with their education incomplete, older persons whose schooling has been of brief duration, the disabled, who have often been at a disadvantage in school and immigrants from countries with less developed school systems.

Government inspection of adult education

Study circle programs, municipal adult education and folk high schools are supervised by the National Board of Education (*Skolöverstyrelsen, SÖ*). Among other things this means that the Board ensures that these courses operate in compliance with the general guidelines laid down by the government and Parliament. It also implies that the national government is responsible for teacher training, and that adult education in the above-described forms is included in the areas of educational research and development work carried out with the help of government funds.

About one fifth of the Board's total R&D budget appropriation now goes to projects in the adult education area. These projects are concerned with operational goals, organizational structure, working methods and teaching aids. A major part of the R&D thrust focuses on the participants in education, their needs and circumstances. But research is also being devoted to those who do not participate, in order to find out the reasons why and to improve the ways of reaching ever larger groups.

Specially arranged labor market training is primarily the concern of the AMU Group, as the training supplier, and the county labor boards as customers. The content, scope and price of training are matters for negotiation between these two sides. Overriding labor market policy decisions (including the evaluation of activities) rest with the National Labor Market Board and the county labor boards, while the AMU Group deals with the pedagogical and educational aspects.

The AMU Group also sells educational and consulting services to other bodies besides the county labor boards. Educational activities are customized and can just as well be organized at places of employment as at the special AMU training centers.

Financing adult education

All three levels of education in Sweden—compulsory comprehensive, upper secondary and higher education—are financed in their entirety out of public funds. No tuition fees are charged. There are still a few private schools, but their number has been declining. Those students who continue their studies beyond the nine-year compulsory comprehensive school receive a government study allowance, which is a continuation of the monthly child allowance the government paid earlier to their parents. Undergraduates in universities, university colleges and professional schools receive government study assistance in the form of outright grants and repayable loans. It is only natural that adult learners should be eligible in principle for the same tuition-free instruction and at least the same study assistance when they take the same types of courses as their younger counterparts.

Study assistance is also payable in the form of hourly and daily study grants to adults who pursue adult studies either for shorter periods or for part of the day on a systematic basis. The hourly study grant makes it feasible to pursue studies in study-circle form on work-time, while the daily study grant helps cover the cost of board and lodging and compensates for the income lost when short courses are taken at folk high schools. The study grant payable to adult students was reformed in 1975 and has been steadily improved since then. Public policy measures in this area have sharply stepped up the inflows into different kinds of adult studies, mainly the municipal adult education and the study circles.

Except for study circles, the types of adult education described above are in principle entirely free of charge, although in practice there may be some expenses for study materials. The tuition fees paid by participants in study circles are quite low.

More than one tenth of the national outlay on education goes to the various kinds of adult education that are described here. On top of that, an equal amount is spent on advancing allowances to students enrolled in labor market training, which is entirely government-financed. Local authority expenditure on adult education has also increased rapidly. Municipal governments pay about one third of the costs of municipal adult education and about the same proportion of the costs of study circles.

National, county and municipal governments together employ more than one fourth of Sweden's working population. Their staff training programs are extensive and are aimed at all categories of employees. Thus through direct payments, subsidy systems and financial assistance to students, the national, county and local governments pay the lion's share of adult education costs in Sweden. Other contributors to these costs include the popular movements, political and non-profit organizations, trade unions and private companies.

Coordination of adult education programs

An important prerequisite for the rapid growth of adult education in recent years has been collaboration between the various agencies and organizations involved. The trade unions have assumed a leading role from the very start, as have the political parties. The political decisions on which the current adult education system is based were reached through consensus among the political parties.

Municipal governments and the educational associations have initiated far-reaching collaboration and created a conscious division of labor on the local plane. Through the national student union and its local branches, the adult learners themselves have become involved in designing the adult education system, recruiting new target groups, encouraging educational development work and improving the financial aid system.

However, coordination is aspired to not only where different kinds of adult education are concerned. The feasibility of coordinating upper secondary education with municipal adult education and labor market training will also be investigated. Taken together, these integrating efforts should lead to more efficient methods of organizing adult courses and should give the individual student better economic conditions and better service facilities. In this way it should become possible for all adults to take part in a process of recurrent education that will help them perform better in their occupations as well as in their general role as members of Swedish society.

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